

"Thanks for your faith in me, Grigori Andreyevich," he said, seizing Gayevoi's hand and pressing it firmly. "Thanks. I won't let you down."

CHAPTER TWELVE

Train after train was despatched. Completing the dismantling and shipping of their equipment, the shops began to evacuate the last of the workers, who had stayed on to finish up the job. Many of them had not sent off their families. These were now first on the list for evacuation. For lack of sufficient boxcars, several crews worked day and night in the open-hearth shop, enclosing and roofing large flatcars, glazing windows, lining the walls with felt, and setting up wide plank benches along the sides. The evacuees were entrained right there, in the shop; and the teeming bay presented a strange sight, crowded with families on the move, littered with trunks, valises, sacks, and bundles.

Grey-bearded Pakhomich rolled up a barrel of dill pickles, and tried to drag it into one of the cars, despite the scolding of the women inside.

An explosion, distant, but ear-rending, hushed the women for a moment; and Pakhomich took advantage of their silence to shout:

"Silly fools! D'you think I want it for myself? We'll all eat pickles on the road. Better than leaving 'em for the Germans!"

No more objections were raised. The barrel was pulled into the car.

"It's the sort of thing you dream in nightmares," Makarov said to Krainev. They were walking along the charging level, behind the furnaces, where they could scan the teeming bay from end to end.

"Well, even in nightmares, I never dreamed such things as happened to me yesterday," Krainev returned, and went on to describe his conversation with Irina.

"She'll come to her senses yet, and follow on in another train," Makarov suggested hopefully.

"No," Krainev replied, with a bitter ring in his voice; "she's not the kind to do a stupid thing by halves."

"If she does decide to go," said Makarov, "you can take her out in a car and put her on our first train. It's stuck at the Novy siding, only seven kilometres out. That was as far as it could get last night, the junction's so badly jammed."

They had reached the door of the evacuation headquarters. Makarov nodded and turned back

down the level, while Krainev opened the door and went in.

Sergei Petrovich had not been cheered by his friend's effort at consolation. He knew that Irina would not leave. Still, he went to the telephone and dialled his apartment. He waited long and patiently, but there was no answer.

No sooner had he laid down the receiver than the telephone rang sharply.

"Who's there?" a voice shouted into his ear; and before he could answer, it hurried on:

"A bomb hit our train at the siding. The cars are on fire."

Krainev spent no more time listening.

A few minutes later, he was speeding towards the siding in one of the ramshackle old cars still left at the works garage. The driver needed no urging, for he, too, had sent off his family on that night's train. The car lurched desperately along the cobbled road, and Sergei Petrovich had to brace his feet firmly on the floor to keep from flying out.

From a rise in the ground, they caught sight of the siding. All the tracks were occupied by waiting trains. The front cars of one of the trains were on fire.

Now the road lay downhill, and the going was smoother. As the distance decreased, Krainev

could make out more details: people working around the burning cars, and the dead and wounded lying beside the tracks.

The driver stopped the car.

"It's not our train," he said, brushing the perspiration from his forehead. "There's a sleeping car for the sick in ours, and there's none in this."

Screams and moans hung over the siding. The driver cranked the car and took it closer to the tracks. People came running towards it.

A young woman ran up, with a wounded child on one arm. Her other arm hung limp, streaming with blood. Her face was distorted with horror. Just as she reached the car, her strength failed her, and she dropped into the roadside dust. Krainev sprang out and lifted mother and child into the car.

Another child was brought up, with a bullet wound through the neck. Two men brought a boy of about ten, in a blue sailor suit, with his right hand torn off at the wrist.

Sergei Petrovich looked up and down the tracks, seeking out the train in which Elena Markarova had left. It was nowhere to be seen. Evidently, it had gotten through.

Everywhere lay the dead and wounded: children, women, the sick and the aged. Scores of people were running towards the car.

"Sergei Petrovich! I'm leaving!" the driver shouted.

Turning, Krainev found that his place in the car, beside the driver, was occupied by a man with a baby in his arms. The child was dead, but the man was shouting frantically at the driver to rush them to the hospital.

"Go ahead," Krainev told him. "I'll walk."

At the last moment, however, he swung onto the running board.

Cars, trucks, ambulances whizzed past the returning car, racing out from town towards the siding.

As the car turned into town, Krainev jumped off. His legs were shaking.

"I'm just tired, from riding outside," he told himself. Sinking onto a bench outside a nearby house, he tried to light a cigarette. The match flame danced in his trembling fingers.

"The nation that gave the world Schiller, and Goethe...."

Irina's words echoed in his ears, and his anger against her blazed into sudden fury. If he could drag her out to that siding, and make her look at it! He thought of his son, with surging anxiety. Who could tell whether the same fate might not befall the train that carried him, at the very next siding?

When Krainev got back to the works, he was informed of an order forbidding shop and department heads to leave the territory. He smiled wryly. The order did not change much. As it was, he had spent days and nights on end at work in the shop.

Pausing on the stairs to the teeming bay, Krainev stood watching a group of workers on the bridge of the last crane. Suddenly, something dropped from the crane and struck the floor with a dull, but heavy thud. Krainev ran down the stairs and joined the group of men collected where it had fallen. They made way for him, and he saw a motor, badly smashed, on a big heap of sawdust.

Bondarev smiled grimly.

"You must have thought it was one of the men," he said. "No. It was just this motor—the last one left. We used it to load all the other stuff, and then there was no way of getting it down. We had to simply push it off. The boys piled up some sawdust, thought maybe they could save it that way. But it was too heavy."

"It looks like we can leave now," said the foreman.

"Yes, you can all leave now," Krainev replied.

He shook hands with the workers, bidding them goodbye. The last to approach him was

Opanasenko, who, though refusing to evacuate, had worked on in the shop to the very last.

"There's still time to change your mind. I'll help you," said Yevstigneyevich," Sergei Petrovich told him.

"No," Opanasenko replied obstinately. "I've made my mind up, and I'm not going to change. I'll be waiting for you here."

Late that evening, Matviyenko searched Krainev out in the drafting department, now transformed into a makeshift dormitory.

"Well, comrade manager," he said, "goodbye! And good luck to you."

"Where are you off to?"

"The front."

"That's not so far," said Krainev, smiling cheerlessly. His eyes clouded over with envy.

"There's something I want to ask of you," Matviyenko said. "In the first place, don't forget Dmitryuk, out in the Urals. I promised to give him a hand. He's a fine old man. In the second place"—and he hesitated awkwardly—"help my wife out, if you can. She'll have a hard time of it, with three kiddies, and in the third place—apply for Party membership. I'll feel it's my fault if you don't. Can I depend on you?"

"Entirely, Mikhail Trofimovich."

"For all the things I've asked?"

"Every one."

"Including the last?"

"Including the last."

"That's fine! You know, I wish we were going together," Matviyenko said, with a sad note in his voice. "You'd make a splendid comrade in battle, I know, just as in work."

They shook hands silently.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Early next morning, all the shop and department heads were summoned to the director's office. They found Dubenko at his desk, with a cigarette, as always, between his teeth. Beside him sat a stranger in a travel-stained leather jacket, to whom he was listening with grave attention. When all had assembled, the stranger glanced about the room, from face to face, with eyes that expressed nothing but weariness.

"I've called you in to hear a lecture on technique," Dubenko said. "Comrade Brovin will deliver it."

"A lecture on technique—with the Germans at the door," Krainev reflected irritably.

The man in the leather jacket did not get up from his chair. In a low, even voice, he set forth to them the elementary rules for the handling of explosives.

"The order to blow up the works may come at any moment," he explained, "and I won't be able to manage it alone."

To illustrate his point, Brovin described to them a recent experience at another works. He had taken the entire task upon himself; but the order to destroy the works had come so late that when the Germans reached the gates he had still been dashing from shop to shop to fire the last remaining fuses. Luckily, he had left to the last the charge in the coal-crushing section of the boiler house; and this had been his salvation. Tons upon tons of powdered coal dust had been thrown into the air, sinking the whole works in impenetrable darkness. Losing his sense of direction, Brovin had groped along a wall, and finally tumbled into a water drain. The covered concrete gutter being dry, he had lain there quietly until evening. Then he had made his way out of the works, and had succeeded in getting back across the front line. Black as a chimney sweep, he had had to scrub his face industriously before he could convince the Soviet command that he was really the same man whose photograph was attached to his documents.

Brovin set the shop managers a definite task: they must know the location of all charges laid in their shops, and be prepared to fire these

charges, if necessary, without his assistance. He told them where and how the charges were to be laid, and what amount of explosive was to be used in each case. Anticipating the question that arose in every mind, he explained that this would not destroy the works completely, but would make its restoration a difficult and lengthy process.

"When we get back, we'll build it up again," he concluded. His lips curved in a smile; but there was no smile in his eyes. They had seen too much in the past few months.

"I must ask to be excused from this job," said Khmelnov, the chief mechanic, rising to his feet. "I'm not going to blow up the works."

"What do you mean—you're not going to?" Dubenko demanded indignantly.

"I can't do it."

"What is this, Khmelnov? Are you planning to stay behind?" Dubenko asked, screwing up one eye.

"No, comrade director. I'm leaving with all of you."

"You know Comrade Stalin's orders, to leave nothing to the enemy. Do you think that doesn't concern you?"

"Of course it concerns me. But . . . well, I can't do it! Try and see it my way, Pyotr Ivan-

ovich," pleaded Khmelnov. "I've been at this works twenty years. Everything that's been built here in those years—I built it, had a hand in it. After all, you can't expect a father to kill his child. Can't it be done without me? It's just too hard—to build it all, and then destroy it, and then start building it up again from scratch."

"If you think you're the only one that finds it hard, you're very much mistaken," Dubenko returned coldly. But, unexpectedly to all, he added: "Very well. You're excused."

The listeners wondered as to his motive. Had he been softened by the mechanic's plea, or lost faith in him, or simply realized that, in any case, he would not obey the order to blow up any part of the works?

Khmelnov bowed his grey head and sat down, sighing heavily.

The laying of the charges was begun immediately after this conference.

An oppressive hush hung over the works. With the exception of the guards and the handful of shop and department heads, there was not a soul on the territory.

Their footsteps echoed hollowly in the stripped and deserted shops. Only the jackdaws were noisy and happy, flying about from stack to stack.

and settling fearlessly on the gas bleeders of the blast furnaces.

Trucks brought the ammonite to the shops, from a storehouse just outside the wall dividing the works territory from the open steppe.

Past the storehouse, men and women from the town, loaded with packs and bundles, were trudging Eastward: down the slope of the gully, across the brook, up the far slope, and out into the rust-brown autumn steppe.

The last train had left at dawn; and the stragglers were following on foot.

Krainev, with two assistants, heaped up the cases of ammonite brought to his shop in five neat piles, one under each of the furnaces. By the time they were done, all three were ready to drop with fatigue. Brovin came in, examined their work critically, and thrust the detonators into place, carefully measuring the fuses. Guards were then posted at the furnaces. From the open-hearth shop, Brovin led the shop managers on a tour of inspection of all the points marked for destruction, ending up at the power station—the farthest removed of all the buildings on the works territory. Here they found no sign of preparations. Brovin turned furiously on Lobachov, demanding:

“Why haven’t you mined the station?”

"It was mined just as soon as the works shut down," Lobachov replied tranquilly.

"Where? How? What charge?"

"There's a concrete channel under the generator, where the cables run. The cable channel. We put a charge of ammonite in there."

"How much?"

"Two tons."

"Can that be checked?"

"It can, of course. Only it's been bricked up and coated with concrete."

"What on earth for?" Brovin asked, a strange spark flickering and dying in his tired eyes.

"To direct the explosion upwards, and increase its force."

"How will you set it off?"

"I'm having wires run right now to a switch in the administration building."

"You're complicating things unnecessarily," said Brovin, his eyes fixed intently on Lobachov. "You pile up some ammonite right here—one ton in this niche, and one in this." He chalked two crosses, beside niches in the concrete bed of the generator. "And remove that wiring of yours immediately. It's dangerous. If there should be a short circuit on the line, the place will go up in the air, with all the people in it."

Again a truck had to be sent out to the storehouse.

When the explosive had been piled in place, and the fuses laid, Polynov, the glum, lanky commander of the works guards, told the watchman at the door:

"Admittance only to Comrades Lobachov and Brovin."

"Or persons knowing the password," Brovin added.

"Why so?" asked Polynov, in evident surprise.

"A necessary precaution. In case anything should change."

Polynov took the watchman aside and whispered the password in his ear.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

The works despatcher's roomy office was stuffy with tobacco smoke. Though full of people, it was very quiet. Kerosene lanterns, set about on the desks, threw a strange, flickering, yellow light on the walls and floor. In one corner lay a pile of sheepskin coats. In another, rifles leaned against the wall.

Makarov sat, half asleep, beside the despatcher, who had been on duty since morning of the

day before. At another desk, Khmel'nov and his assistant were at work over the lists of evacuated equipment. The senior cashier lay fast asleep by the wall, beside a sack of money. Having paid off the last of the workers, early that morning, he had cleared out his safe and come to join the others in the despatcher's office. People sat and lay about everywhere, at the desks and even on the floor, though there were plenty of camp beds in the next room. A long table, squeezed in among the beds, was heaped with bread and sausage; but nobody could eat.

This room was the only spot in the works which still continued to function—a heart, beating without a body. From here, the telephone lines branched out: direct wires for communication with the guards, and other wires, stretching across the murky steppe to neighbouring works and to the regional centre.

Not for many years had the Donbas known a night so dark as this. Even through the blackout, the murk of the steppe had been relieved by the glow hanging over the iron and steel plants. Tonight, darkness reigned over all.

Clearly, this was to be the last night in the works. The clock on the wall pointed a quarter to ten. Time dragged with sickening slowness.

Dubenko came in, pale and unshaven, with sunken cheeks.

"Have the lines checked," he told the superintendent of the telephone exchange. "I can't get connected with the Deputy People's Commissar. He's in the next town."

The director looked around the room, evidently making a mental roll call. He seemed about to say something, but changed his mind and did not speak. Sitting down beside the despatcher, he began to leaf the evacuation records.

"How many of our engineers and skilled personnel have left?" he asked.

"Six hundred and eighty, out of seven hundred and two," the despatcher replied, without looking into his lists.

"Did Valsky leave?"

"Yes, but they say he disappeared before the train reached Debaltsevo."

The exchange superintendent returned, and reported that contact with the neighbouring towns was lost due to damage somewhere on the line.

After a moment's hesitation, Dubenko ordered Makarov to take a car immediately and report to the Deputy People's Commissar for instructions. Following Makarov out of the room, he added:

"Only hurry back as fast as you can, or the Germans will find us still waiting here for orders."

Again silence fell in the despatcher's office. Even Khmelnov put away his lists and sat motionless, sunk in thought. The clock ticked monotonously on. At the hour, there was a hissing of springs, then again the steady ticking. The striking mechanism had been stopped, because every unnecessary sound set people's taut nerves tingling.

But the hush, too, was a nervous strain. Krainev thought of getting up and walking up and down the room; but his aching muscles protested. Half a year's intensive work, the last few sleepless days and nights, the innumerable cases of ammonite he had carried on his back that day, were making themselves felt.

If he could only sleep! But sleep would not come. And he lay staring up at the ceiling, listening to the ticking of the clock. Brovin, beside him, sighed in his sleep.

The telephone rang. The despatcher lifted the receiver, and immediately called to Krainev:

"Sergei Petrovich! Your shop electrician's out at the gate. He wants to come in."

"I thought he'd left," said Krainev perplexedly. "Well, let him through."

Pivovarov launched into rambling and protracted explanations of how he had missed the last train and been left behind.

"You could have gone on foot," said the despatcher, interrupting this endless tale.

"And how far would I get?" Pivovarov demanded reproachfully. "I got a bullet in my leg way back in the Civil War, and it's been bothering me ever since."

Relenting somewhat, the despatcher said:

"All right, all right. We'll find truck room for you somehow."

Pivovarov left. The despatcher dozed off at his desk.

The exchange superintendent came in again, announcing that the men he had sent to repair the line had found the wires removed and the insulators smashed on several posts just outside the town.

"Does Dubenko know?" asked the despatcher, wide awake at once.

"Yes. He's sent for Gayevoi, and asked the telephone operators to search out Boyenko—he's somewhere in town."

The telephone rang shrilly, awakening all but Brovin.

"Let him through, in his car," the despatcher said into the telephone. His face was pale. Put-

ting down the receiver, he told the anxious listeners:

"A messenger from the Deputy People's Commissar."

Nechayev glanced significantly at Khmel'nov.

They heard the hum of the engine, and the scream of the brakes as the car was pulled up sharply at the entrance. Then, hasty footsteps on the stairs, and the opening and closing of the director's door. A moment later, the director's hurried step in the corridor brought almost everyone to their feet.

Dubenko came in.

"Set off the charges immediately," he said—and his voice caught in his throat. "The order's come a little late. They couldn't reach us by phone, so they had to send a messenger."

Again the telephone rang. The operator was searching for the director; but Dubenko only shrugged. The despatcher plugged in the phone loudspeaker.

It was the commander of an Army rearguard detachment. Reporting that German tanks and mobile infantry were outflanking the town from the South, he ordered that the works be blown up at once.

"Hurry, hurry," Dubenko urged. "Where's the sapper?"

Somebody woke Brovin. The second or two that passed while he rubbed his eyes seemed an eternity. Starting up, he said tersely:

"Each takes his own shop. I'll help in the open-hearth—there's five charges there. Send someone out with Lobachov. And call in the guards."

He and Krainev ran towards the open-hearth shop. The rays of their flashlights came back at them from tracks and ties, from heaps of ingots, from glistening puddles.

"You take the first two," Brovin shouted. "I'll take the rest."

Krainev stopped by No. 2 furnace, waiting for Brovin to reach No. 5. Soon Brovin's voice came to him hoarsely from the depths of the shop:

"Fire!"

Krainev set a lighted match to the end of the fuse.

A thin tongue of flame licked out, hissing fiercely. Stumbling, Krainev hurried to No. 1 and fired the fuse there. Then, his head sunk between his shoulders, in momentary expectation of explosion, he ran out of the shop and made for the administration building.

The open-hearth shop was the closest, and Krainev was the first to return. He found Dubenko, Khmelnov, and the despatcher silently waiting. Nodding in response to Dubenko's enquiring

glance, Krainev noticed the nervous knots of muscle on the director's cheeks. Khmelnov sat with bowed head.

Two explosions, almost simultaneous, rocked the walls. The floor shook, and there was a tinkling of broken glass. The blinds blew up like sails. One of them tore its fastenings and dropped to the floor.

"No. 2 and No. 5," flashed through Krainev's mind.

A few seconds later, new explosions sounded, in rapid succession. Papers flew from the desks. The lanterns flickered.

One by one, the shop managers returned, morose and grimy. Gayevoi came in, followed by Polynov. Brovin, moaning between clenched teeth, was brought in on somebody's shoulders. He had caught his foot on a rail and wrenched his ankle. They laid him on the floor.

The last to appear was Nechayev, who had been sent with Lobachov to the power station.

"Did you fire the charges?" Dubenko asked.

"Of course."

"Both of them?" asked Brovin.

"Yes, of course."

"Who fired them?"

"I fired one, and Lobachov the other."

"Where's Lobachov?" Dubenko wondered.

Nechayev looked around the room.

"I don't know," he said. "He ran off ahead of me."

There was a silence. The works doctor, kneeling beside Brovin, unlaced his shoe and examined his ankle. Five painful minutes dragged by. Raising himself on his elbow, Brovin said:

"Comrade director, the charges at the power station can't have been set off. The detonators were carefully checked. They couldn't have failed."

All eyes turned to Nechayev.

"Why didn't you set them off?" the director thundered.

"Pyotr Ivanovich, I did, and so did Lobachov. We each fired one fuse," Nechayev returned, pale with the realization that he was not believed.

"Polynov will go, Krainev, and...."

Dubenko paused, looking around the room.

"And I," said Gayevoi.

"Take these along. They may be needed," said Brovin, holding out a bundle of fuses and detonators.

Krainev was standing closer to Brovin than the others. He took the fuses, and ran out together with Polynov and Gayevoi.

Again the flashlight rays, skipping along rails and ties. There was the power station. Up the stairs, in at the door, down the passage. The

niches in the concrete bed. Both fuses were fresh and clean, showing no signs of fire.

"Scoundrels!" muttered Gayevoi. He put a match to the near fuse, and it took fire instantly.

Krainev ran to the other niche, and fired the second fuse.

They all ran out together; but Krainev soon fell behind. He was so tired that his heart kept stopping.

Suddenly, behind him, he heard the sound of a door being opened and shut.

"Who can it be?" he wondered. "Could Dubenko have sent someone else to help us out? Or maybe it's Dubenko himself, or Boyenko?"

Whoever it was, he would fly up into the air together with the station. Krainev turned, hoping against hope to make it there and back before the explosion.

The fuses were timed to burn ten minutes.

Pivovarov was standing beside the near niche, with a pair of scissors in his hand. On the floor lay two charred and smoking bits of fuse. He started at Krainev's appearance. For an instant they stood staring silently at one another. Then Krainev, bending swiftly, lifted a heavy wrench from the floor.

"Are you mad, Sergei Petrovich?" cried Pi-

vovarov, evidently frightened. "There's orders not to blow up the station!"

"Whose orders?" Krainev demanded, hardly believing his ears.

"Dubenko's," said Pivovarov, more calmly. "There's been a mistake, Sergei Petrovich. It's our own troops that are coming up. Here's the order."

He held out a sheet of paper, torn from the director's memorandum pad. It bore three words: "Stop explosions. Dubenko."

Krainev knew the signature well. There was no mistaking it. His head in a whirl, he leaned weakly against the piled explosive, thinking:

"A fine mistake! The whole works blown up for nothing!"

And the rent outlines of the open-hearth furnaces seemed to rise before him.

"Well, let's be going," he said, pulling himself together.

"No," Pivovarov returned. "I'll stay and keep guard here. The watchmen will soon be coming, but in the meanwhile we can't leave the place alone."

There was a happy ring in his voice.

Striding back along the ties, Krainev reflected:

"Our own troops! And how are we greeting them? A mistake! Shooting's too good for people that make such mistakes!"

He hastened his steps, drawing new energy from his grim anger.

Suddenly, a burst of machine-gun fire cut through the night.

"Queer! Our own troops. Then why should there be shooting?" he wondered, with swift suspicion.

Rallying his strength, he began to run. When he reached the administration building, it was hushed and deserted. Not a living soul, not a single car or truck at the entrance. He stopped short, in complete bewilderment. The flashlight fell from his lax grip and went out. Again suspicion, a frightful suspicion, filled his brain. But he shook his head. He could not admit such thoughts.

An automatic rifle was discharged, somewhere very near. Krainev looked up. A column of trucks was rolling in through the open gates. The leading cars sped past along the asphalt driveway towards the shops. The last few slowed down on the approach to the administration building. Only now did Krainev realize that they were German.

He stood motionless, pressed against a corner of the building, paralyzed with shock. Then he began to run, heavily, stumbling over the ties in the darkness, breathless with effort and weariness, choking with fury.

"Idiot!" he exclaimed aloud. "Fooled like a baby!"

Then, stopping suddenly:

"But Dubenko's signature. How'd he get Dubenko's signature?"

And again he was running, fighting down his overpowering exhaustion, crying desperately:

"They won't get away with it! I'll blow it up!"

He found the passage flooded with a fitful light. Yellowish, translucent smoke was creeping along the floor. This was strange; but Krainev wasted no time on wonder. He ran on to the generator. The cases of ammonite piled up in the niches were on fire. At first he could not understand why there was no explosion. Then he recalled that ammonite explodes only by detonation. He pulled a fuse and detonator from his pocket. The outer door banged, several times in succession.

Quickly, he threw the detonator into the fire. Falling onto the burning lid of the uppermost case, the detonator exploded immediately; and that was all. He put a hand into his pocket for another, although he understood that it could do no good. But at this moment heavy footsteps sounded behind him. Dodging past the burning cases, he ran to the nearest window and tumbled out through the broken glass.

He could not get up. His knee, bruised in the fall, pained him severely. But he crawled away through the darkness, careless of direction, anxious only to get away from the power station and the Germans inside it. No one pursued him. The soldiers had evidently stopped to put out the fire. But he crawled on as rapidly as he could. At length he reached the street wall, and, after some search, found a breach formed during the last air raid. Through this he climbed out onto the sidewalk.

Here his strength deserted him. Sitting on the curb, his back against a post, he stared in through the breach in the wall, in expectation of pursuit.

Suddenly a ray of light slid over the pavement and up the walls of the houses opposite. Turning, Krainev saw tanks, in dim outline, at the end of the street. He had never imagined that they might come from that direction.

He crawled across the street, and in at somebody's gate. Lying flat on the ground behind the fence, he watched the tanks rumble by.

They disappeared; but it was a long time before he could make himself get up.

Finally, he crossed the yard, which backed against the park. Climbing through a hole in the fence, he found himself in the shelter of the

trees. Here he recalled that the house in which he lived also backed against the park; and he struck across the grass towards home.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Trains, trains without end. Some, carrying machine tools, turbines, harvester combines, motors, tractors, cranes, sowing machines, huge machine parts, structural iron shapes of every kind, and glum, silent people—rolling East. Others, carrying guns, planes, trucks, caissons, tanks, field kitchens, and noisy Army men—rolling West.

The West-bound trains were expresses, speeding almost without pause past the congested stations, past the once sleepy by-stations, now awakened to vigorous life. Sometimes they occupied both tracks, and all the East-bound trains stood still.

Then the people who were travelling East would camp and cook; and the stations would be veiled in the smoke of countless fires.

The railway lines were littered with ashes and excrement, with smashed cars and locomotives. Fresh graves appeared beside the station buildings. And still, with every day, more and more trains moved East.

People travelled in passenger cars and box-cars; in hopper cars, rudely equipped for habitation; on open flatcars, protected from the weather by improvised shelters thrown up of boards and snow shields and roofed with blankets or, more often, with straw. Many rode under the open sky: on the roofs of the crowded cars; on tenders; on the high-piled freight.

Some—the majority—travelled in organized groups. These knew that work awaited them in plants and factories—for some, in the Ural forests; for others, in the steppes of Kazakhstan, or the Siberian tundra. Others travelled without organization or definite goal; but these, too, knew that work awaited them.

It was a great, unparalleled migration of plants and factories, towns and villages. The whole Soviet Union seemed to be on wheels, moving part East, part West.

At first it seemed to Elena Makarova that strict plan and schedule existed only for the troop trains; but after a few days she began to see that the movement of the East-bound traffic, too, was controlled by definite rules and principles. Thus, the trains carrying evacuees were invariably sent through at the first possibility, in preference to all others. At times, indeed, Elena felt rather guilty at the realization

that her train, with its burden of women and children, of the sick and the aged, was pushing far ahead of the machinery and equipment so badly needed in the East. Such is the unalterable Soviet principle: human lives come first; and it was never abandoned, through the grimmest days of trial.

The cars grew more and more crowded. Husbands and fathers, leaving the works as the dismantling drew to completion, began to catch up with their families. Hearing the joyful cries of greeting at the door, Elena would stiffen in eager expectation. Perhaps, this time, it would be Vasili? But Makarov did not come. Nobody came, of the group which had remained behind to blow up the works.

The new arrivals brought alarming tidings of the sudden seizure of the town. Elena's spirits fell perceptibly, and the children, sensing her mood, grew subdued and silent. Victor stopped asking when they would be going home; Vadim put fewer and fewer questions about his father.

Gradually, a daily routine took shape. The fathers of families would disappear of a morning, to return, hours later, laden with provisions. Mothers travelling without their husbands received supplies from the emergency store which had been loaded on the train before de-

parture. How Elena's heart bled when she was entered on the list for these supplies!

Now and again, there were quarrels in the car. Elena found it hard to understand how people who had lost so much could quarrel over trifles: a milkpan, perhaps, or the use of the stove for cooking.

Not all were equally prepared for the exigencies of travel. Some had taken with them from home only the barest essentials; others had dragged along almost everything they owned. This was an important factor in their present situation.

Elena Makarova had prepared for departure alone, without advice or assistance. Her husband had barely had time to put her and the boy onto the train and bid them a hasty farewell. And now she was beginning to realize the significance of all the trifles she had left behind. Thus, for lack of a container of any sort, she could buy the children no milk.

Observing the life of her fellow passengers, Elena found that many others were as badly off as she. One of these was Maria Matviyenko, a quiet young woman with three small children on her hands; another, Pakhomova.

During one of their stops—the train stood still a good half of the time—Elena proposed that such things as pots and pans, hatchets,

bottles, mugs, be used by all in common, regardless of ownership. There was some grumbling and dispute; but in the end, the minority yielding to the majority, this proposal was adopted. Things became a little easier.

And then assistance came from an altogether unexpected quarter. One day, when Elena took the children out for a walk during a protracted stop, she was approached by a grim-looking old man in a sheepskin coat.

"Are those children yours?" he asked, knitting his heavy grey brows.

"Why, yes," Elena answered, at once surprised and alarmed.

"That one too?" he persisted, nodding at Vadim.

"That one too."

"But isn't he Sergei Petrovich's little boy?" Flushing, Elena answered:

"Yes, he's Sergei Petrovich's son."

"Just what I thought!" said the old man, chuckling; and he strode away, leaving Elena to puzzle, vaguely alarmed, over the incident.

Next day he came into her car, grunting with effort as he climbed the steep iron steps. Silently, he set down on the plank bench beside the children a bottle of milk and a small basket of apples.

"Who are you?" asked Elena, deeply touched.
"Grandad," he returned, smiling. "You're the lad's mother, now. Well, and I'll be his grandad."

When the old man—it was Dmitryuk—had gone, Victor said loudly:

"D'you know who that is, mama? It's Grandfather Frost, only he's shaved off his beard!"

Everyone laughed. From that day forth, Dmitryuk was known in car No. 2 as "Grandfather Frost."

The old man made his appearance daily. Where and how he got the milk, nobody knew; but it was clear that the getting was not easy.

One day he did not come until evening. He seemed tired and upset.

The milk he brought had curdled; and, shamefacedly, he was compelled to tell the story of the day's adventures. He had bought the milk early that morning, in a village some distance from the station where the train was standing. When he got back, the train had already left. Only by climbing onto the tender of a hospital train had he managed to overtake it.

Soon a second Grandfather Frost appeared, taking charge of Maria Matviyenko and her children. True, the new "grandfather" could boast neither beard nor moustache, and his eyes

had a youthful, almost boyish gleam; but he yielded in no way to Dmitryuk in the fulfilment of his duties. This was Shatilov. Recognizing Maria at one of the stations, he immediately volunteered to assist her, even moving into car No. 2 to be on hand in case of need—an invasion which at first caused some dissatisfaction among the other inhabitants of the car. Within a day or two, Shatilov doubled his responsibilities, undertaking to provide for Pakhomova as well. After this, there were no more reproaches.

Dmitryuk was always sorely vexed when he failed to bring in as rich booty as the strong, active young Comsomol foreman. To spare the old man's feelings, Shatilov made it a rule to share with him.

One day, at a by-station where they seemed likely to be held up for several hours, both tracks being occupied by West-bound troop trains, the train commander called a meeting of all the bachelors on board. Some seventy men gathered beside the locomotive, and the commander had to climb onto the cab ladder to make himself seen and heard. He was a member of the works trade union committee—one-armed and elderly, but full of youthful energy.

"You all know Dmitryuk, don't you?" he began.

"Sure," a number of the men replied.
"And Shatilov?"

"Of course," came the unanimous response. Shatilov's was a name that had gained recognition throughout the works.

"And do you know why car No. 2 calls both of them Grandfather Frost?"

That nobody knew, and the train commander went on to explain the origin and significance of the nickname. Then, bracing his shoulder against the ladder to free his only hand, he pulled a sheet of paper from his pocket and read off the names of the women on the train, travelling with children, whose husbands had not overtaken them. He proposed that the bachelors undertake to help them out.

"What a bright idea!" someone shouted. "We've got our own selves to feed. All they give us bachelors on the train is bread, and now one-arm wants us to feed the whole works!"

Loud shouts and hisses drowned the dissenter's voice.

The train commander raised his arm.

"Who knows Vasya Buroi?" he demanded cheerfully.

"We all know him!" the bachelors responded.

"Well, then, what are you yelling about, if you do? There's nothing to get excited over.

Vasya has to grumble—that's his way. But he'll do the job. Is that right, Vasya?"

"Did you and me ever say wrong?" Vasya returned.

And the shouts gave place to laughter.

The train commander continued:

"I'm appointing Dmitryuk commander of the Grandfather Frost brigade. And for commissar"—he looked earnestly from face to face—"for commissar, each of you has your own conscience."

He sprang down to the ground.

That same day the members of the new brigade set about their duties, each to the extent of his abilities.

The days passed without alarms. By night, however, German planes would appear, bombing and strafing the lines. At big stations, they were kept off by furious antiaircraft fire; but at small by-stops, and on the stretches between stations, they had less to fear.

Sometimes two or three nights would pass quietly, and people would begin to think the danger zone was past. But then the planes would come again.

One night, out in the open steppe, several of the rear cars were set on fire by incendiary bombs. One of the burning cars contained the works draft files. Soon the cases in which the drafts were

packed began to catch. There was no water within reach.

The workers fought frantically to save the precious drafts, smashing the sides of the car, dragging out the heavy cases, trying to smother the flames with blankets, clothing, soil—all to no avail. The files would have been reduced to ashes, had not the engine driver from the train behind come to the rescue. Uncoupling his locomotive, he brought it racing down the track and sprayed the burning cases with water from his engine pump. Most of the drafts were saved.

The next day was a gloomy one for car No. 2.

Shatilov did not show up at all. With severe burns of the face and arms, he lay in the sleeping car reserved for the sick, in excruciating pain, wondering whether his sight could be saved, or whether he would be blind for life.

Dmitryuk came up to the door and called Elena. He held his blistered hands clumsily away from his body, the fingers spread. His eyebrows and half of his moustache were gone, but the scorched half that remained bristled as valiantly as ever.

"No milk for the boys today," he said sadly. But Elena was more concerned over his crippled

hands, and singed moustache. In a despairing glance, he told her come on, grow back. Maybe they'll come back or red, for all I care. Anything's grey! And my hands will heal, too. be far to the Urals, but we'll be getting there."

And, before Elena could say strode away to his own car. The boys were not left without ever. Dmitryuk's duties were to Vasili Buroi. Vasili, too, had a face; but his hands were unharmed.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Dubenko and his shop and headed on several trucks for eight days and nights they pushed and leaving behind long lines of tons, flocks of sheep, herds of stopping only when heavy ni country roads impassable.

The first day or two, Dubenko was dead. Only the sound of distant bound up for months with

hands, and singed moustache. Noting her anxious glance, he told her comfortingly:

"Don't you worry about the whiskers. They'll grow back. Maybe they'll come black again—or red, for all I care. Anything's better than grey! And my hands will heal, too. It may not be far to the Urals, but we'll be a long time getting there."

And, before Elena could say a word, he strode away to his own car.

The boys were not left without milk, however. Dmitryuk's duties were taken over by Vasili Buroi. Vasili, too, had burns about the face; but his hands were unharmed.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Dubenko and his shop and department chiefs headed on several trucks for Stalingrad. For eight days and nights they pushed on—overtaking and leaving behind long lines of carts and wagons, flocks of sheep, herds of cattle and horses—stopping only when heavy night rains made the country roads impassable.

The first day or two, Dubenko slept like the dead. Only the sound of distant bomb explosions, bound up for months with poignant anxiety for

him now and then, after one he would soon then a German m, he did not rag him bodily e safety of the

ck, beside the day nor night. gave him no t had become self for leav- ld have been bile infantry, making es- ds. Dashing, the works the trucks

lingrad. In with broad spreading nition were s. Nothing of money nts of the ing night

encampments under the pouring rain. The money was soon turned in at the bank, and the alcohol shared out, for the last time, at their bivouac beside the railway warehouse.

After brief discussion, it was decided that Dubenko head straight for Sverdlovsk, where the People's Commissariat was now situated, and Gayevoi for Moscow, to report to the Party Central Committee. The rest were either to remain in Morozovskaya until the trains that carried their families came up, or, as some preferred, to travel back along the line to meet them.

"What am I to say about the power station?"

This was Dubenko's only thought, all the way to Sverdlovsk. The trip did not take him long. At Gumrak, just beyond Stalingrad, he noticed a hospital train on the tracks—the fastest type of East-bound transport; and the surgeon in command of it turned out to be the former head of the town military hospital, which Dubenko had accorded considerable assistance in the months before evacuation. Learning of Dubenko's difficulties, the surgeon gave him passage in his own compartment on the hospital train.

"What shall I say about the power station?" Dubenko asked himself again, as he entered the

the safety of the works, roused him now and again to consciousness; and even then, after one glance at the steppe around him, he would soon relapse into his heavy sleep. When a German plane swooped down to gun them, he did not even stir. His neighbours had to drag him bodily out of the truck to the comparative safety of the ground.

Gayevoi rode in the leading truck, beside the driver. As before, he slept neither day nor night. The memory of the power station gave him no peace. He could not understand what had become of Krainev, could not forgive himself for leaving a comrade behind. But there could have been no question of waiting. German mobile infantry had appeared at the end of the street, making escape or capture a matter of seconds. Dashing, with extinguished headlights, out of the works gates and into a nearby side street, the trucks had emerged safely into the steppe.

They did not get as far as Stalingrad. In Morozovskaya, a big Cossack centre, with broad streets and roomy houses backed by spreading orchards, their trucks, rifles, and ammunition were requisitioned by passing military units. Nothing remained of their baggage but a sack of money and a big bottle containing the remnants of the alcohol that had been shared out during night

crowded waiting room and requested the secretary to report his arrival.

Tactful and considerate, solicitous for the welfare of his subordinates, the People's Commissar, as Dubenko well knew, was at the same time relentlessly demanding. He was slow to impose punishment, to demote or remove men in responsible posts. When necessary, he would afford them every assistance and support. But once he became convinced that his support was no longer deserved, his sentence would be firm and rigorous. Men whom he had been compelled to remove were never again entrusted with responsibility on the same scale as before.

The secretary quickly returned and invited Dubenko into the office.

Rising as he came in, the People's Commissar held out a hand in greeting, and exclaimed:

"Good work! You're one of the first to arrive from the Donbas. We're waiting impatiently for that armour-plate mill of yours. We need it—well, like this!"—and the People's Commissar, always so sparing of gesture, drew a finger across his throat. "Yes, that bad. We'll start setting it up right away, at Rotov's. The building and foundations are almost ready. Which train is it on? Number three?"

"I . . . I think so."

"You think so?" The People's Commissar raised his eyebrows. "It's all right for me to say, 'I think,' with all the iron and steel plants of the South on wheels. It's your job to know."

He opened a folder stuffed with reports, and glanced through it quickly. Finding what he sought, he went on:

"Yes. Number three. Where is it now? Coming up?"

Dubenko felt a cold chill run down his spine as he replied:

"I don't know."

"You—what?"

"When I left Morozovskaya, none of our trains had come through there yet."

The People's Commissar was calm, very calm; but Dubenko saw the effort it cost him to restrain himself.

"Then what did you come all the way out here for?" he asked. "To report that you've arrived? What do I want with such reports?"

Dubenko did not reply. It seemed to him that the Commissar's eyes had grown deeper, blacker.

"What I need is your works. Your men, I need, and your equipment. And not only the ar-

mour-plate mill, either. They're expecting your generator at Tagil, and your cranes at Zlatoust. All the Urals plants could use your motors. What did you come here to tell me? That you're doing nothing, that you don't know a thing? Is that it?"

"Comrade People's Commissar...."

"Comrade director! A captain doesn't leave his ship until he's brought it safely into port. And you?"

Dubenko shivered. What would he not have given, at this moment, to have the People's Commissar shout and rage! Such bursts of wrath, he knew, were but short-lived; and while they lasted, the People's Commissar never decided important questions. His decisions, final and unbending, were reached only after calm and deliberate consideration.

The People's Commissar pressed a finger sharply down on the bell. The secretary came in and stopped beside his desk.

"My plane, immediately, and ship him off on it to Morozovskaya ... no, to Stalingrad. And don't let him in here again until he can report that all seven trains have reached their destinations."

And, without so much as a glance at Dubenko, the People's Commissar turned to his tele-

phone. Leaving the
say: "Connect me
Railways."

Now at one
peared: a lean
between his eye
never buttoned;
open people no
It was not lon
to recognize hi

He never
director of a
likely to mak
the most obs
stations, were
from Moscow
tance of his
strate that it

Dubenko
manded, dem
torily than

"I'm Du
officials, as
in duty ob

And the
progress.

phone. Leaving the room, Dubenko heard him say:

"Connect me with the People's Commissar of Railways."

Now at one junction, now at another, he appeared: a lean little man, with a deep furrow between his eyebrows. He wore a leather jacket, never buttoned; and when the jacket front swung open people noticed a decoration on his breast. It was not long before the railway folk began to recognize him at sight.

He never named his position. The title of director of a no longer existing works was not likely to make much impression. In these times, the most obscure officials, at the least-known by-stations, were daily besieged by special messengers from Moscow, each urging the very special importance of his particular train, and trying to demonstrate that it must be sent through ahead of others.

Dubenko neither urged nor pleaded. He demanded, demanded even more flatly and peremptorily than he had at the works.

"I'm Dubenko," he would say to the station officials, as though this were a name they were in duty obliged to recognize and respect.

And the works trains began to make better progress.

To the director's infinite satisfaction, train No. 3 pushed ahead of the rest. Through the window of a station office, one day, he saw it coming up. There they were: the powerful stands of the armour-plate mill; the enormous rolls, their smooth surface thickly coated with grease; the tall, flat-topped motor, carefully boarded over.

Dubenko hurried to the platform; and just outside the station door, he collided with Makarov. Overjoyed at this meeting, for he had been deeply concerned over Makarov's fate, he swept the chief engineer into a hearty embrace. In describing his interview with the People's Commissar, however, he omitted many details.

Dubenko could not tell, as yet, what the future held for him. He had read his sentence in the eyes of the People's Commissar, and was very far from confident that this sentence might be rescinded, or even commuted, as a result of any success he might achieve in pushing through the trains. Nonetheless, he sped on, from station to station—demanding, reproaching, despatching telegrams in every direction.

"The maniac's headed your way," one station-master would warn another.

And, to avoid grappling with Dubenko, station after station would send his trains on before others, despite the pleadings of a dozen

special messengers, equipped with the most imposing credentials.

Through Dubenko's story, Makarov seemed rather impatient; and the moment the director paused, he hurried inside to the station office. Here he presented a telegram, signed by the People's Commissar of Railways, ordering that train No. 3 from Dubenko's works be sent through on a par with hospital trains. This telegram had been despatched to all the stations along the line, from Debaltsevo on.

Dubenko hung his head. Now he understood why No. 3 was forging ahead so rapidly. The People's Commissar was pushing it. He, Dubenko, had no hand in it.

"Oh, well," he reflected. "There's another six trains. I still have plenty to do."

Following Makarov out onto the platform, he asked him for the telegram. Makarov gave it to him willingly.

"I've got another," he explained. "I hooked it off the desk at one of the stations, just to have in reserve."

"Fine! Now every one of our trains will be No. 3. They'll have to let 'em through, and once they're through, I don't care what anyone says. Well, that's that. Now tell me how you got away."

Makarov related briefly how he had searched out the Deputy People's Commissar, only to learn from him of the seizure of the works. Then he had driven East, caught up with No. 3, and immediately set to work to push it through. Unfortunately, the train had raced without a stop past a crowded siding where, as it turned out, No. 1 was standing; and Makarov had thus missed his family.

Further on, however, he had met up with a worker from No. 1, who had told him a little about the life on the train, including the near-loss of the draft fiels.

This worker was Vasili Buroi.

As the trains advanced further East, stops and delays had become much shorter, and members of the Grandfather Frost brigade had more and more often been left behind. Therefore, at Buroi's suggestion, new tactics had been adopted. If the Grandfathers found nothing to buy at the station where the train had stopped, they would no longer range afield. Instead, they would board the first East-bound train and ride ahead several stations. Then they could buy up provisions in nearby villages with no fear of being left behind, and, their baskets full, either wait for their train or ride back to meet it.

But there was one thing Buroi did not tell

the chief engineer. Victor had come down with typhoid fever, and had been shifted, with his mother, to the sleeping car. Vadim was now in charge of Dmitryuk, who no longer participated in the Grandfathers' excursions, but organized and directed their work, checking daily on their accomplishments.

Dubenko's talk with Makarov was soon interrupted, with no time for goodbyes. The station bell sounded, buffers clanged loudly, and No. 3 began to move. Makarov raced after it and sprang onto one of the cars.

From that day on, all the works trains moved faster. Each of them was labelled "No. 3," with the name of the works in big letters; the commander of each confronted officials at every station with a document identifying him as the commander of train No. 3 (this was easily done, since Dubenko carried with him the works seal and several pads of blanks); and, time after time, Dubenko insisted that this, indeed, was the genuine No. 3.

One after another, Penza sent through four such "No. 3's." The stationmaster groaned. How many more would there be?

In the end, the director of the line lost his temper and ordered his assistant to bring the "maniac" to the line office the next time he appeared.

Dubenko evinced no particular enthusiasm at the prospect of an encounter with the line director; but he made no attempt to evade the invitation.

The office door opened, admitting a lean little man with a nervous face and fixed, unwinking eyes. At sight of him, the line director's indignation suddenly evaporated.

For some time he sat staring silently at Dubenko. Then he asked:

"Did you ever work in the Cheka?"

One of Dubenko's eyebrows shot up.

"I did," he replied.

"In Saratov?"

"In Saratov."

"Don't you remember me?"

Dubenko's other eyebrow shot up.

"Hold on! Our old commander? Well, well, you've certainly changed! Fattened up, even pads around the eyes. And I always thought a line director had a strenuous job!"

"You've gotten thin as a rail, yourself."

Dubenko shrugged.

"I was always like one of Pharaoh's lean cows," he said, sinking into a chair. "Only in those days I was twenty years younger."

"Yes, it's twenty years. It's a lot of water has flowed under bridges in all this time, and a lot of trains rumbled over them."

The line director's assistant, who had followed Dubenko into the room, was badly disappointed. He had expected quite a different reception for the "maniac," who had caused him more vexation than all the special messengers taken together.

"How many trains have you labelled No. 3?" the line director asked.

"Not many. There's only three left."

"Listen here, Dubenko! You were trained in the Cheka, after all!"

"Well, and if I was?"

"I don't know about you, but I, for one, can never forget what Dzerzhinsky told us: 'He who works in the Cheka must have a hot heart, a cool head, and clean hands.' And what have you? A hot heart, and an insane head; and your hands? Your hands are dirty. You're simply swindling. Seven trains, all No. 3! You're not the only one that needs to get through."

Dubenko flushed angrily. Jumping to his feet, he began to pace rapidly up and down the room.

"Everyone fights for himself, and it works for the good of all," he declared. "You tell me—what will decide the outcome of the war? Iron and steel!"

"And what about transportation? Do you think for a minute transportation's secondary?"

"And what are your rails made of? Wood? Who do you think I'm pushing our tyre turning lathes for, and our rail and structural mill? Who, do you think? Myself, maybe?"

"Where are you stopping?" the line director asked abruptly, noticing in Dubenko's eyes the feverish light that so appalled all the station officials.

"Betwixt and between four Penzas," Dubenko returned caustically. "The craziest town I've ever seen: four railway stations! By the time you tramp from Penza one to Penza four and back again, there's a day gone."

"Want a night's sleep?"

"What about my trains?"

"I'll send them through. But I'm going to wire both People's Commissars—yours and mine—and let them know the sort of tricks you're playing."

Getting up, the line director opened a door leading to an inner room.

"There's a cot in there, and some vodka in the desk drawer. Half a litre. It's been standing there two months and more. I take a sniff now and then, and it does me good. Take off your things and go to sleep."

He pushed Dubenko into the room and closed the door behind him.

"What shall I do about the trains?" asked his assistant, who had been listening to the conversation with growing interest.

"Let 'em straight through without a stop. The devil take them all! How can we tell which is really No. 3? He's the boss, and he numbers his trains as he pleases. Only write me out two telegrams to the People's Commissars. Let them puzzle it out themselves."

Two weeks later, the director and the chief engineer were admitted together into the office of the People's Commissar. He was talking over the telephone, and two more telephones waited, with receivers removed, for his attention.

Dubenko tried to make his step firm; but he was staggering with fatigue and worry.

Makarov's eyes were so dull and lifeless that the People's Commissar looked up at him in alarm.

"What's wrong, Comrade Makarov?" he asked, laying down his receiver.

"My little boy is dead. And my second is very ill."

Without waiting to be asked, the chief engineer dropped heavily into a chair.

"What with?"

"Pneumonia."

"I beg your pardon, Comrade Makarov, but I thought you only had one boy."

Makarov stared at the People's Commissar amazedly. How did he know? True, the subject of family had once come up, but only in passing.

He told the story of Vadim, and of Krainev's disappearance.

The People's Commissar asked his secretary to call in a consultant. While waiting, he returned to his telephone conversation.

Dubenko dozed in his chair. Makarov sat motionless, staring into the corner.

Vasili Nikolayevich had not seen the little grave, beside a distant siding in the steppe; but it floated always before his eyes.

The consultant came in. The People's Commissar finished his conversation, and, turning to the consultant, said:

"Find out who is the best children's doctor here in town. Put him on a plane and send him off with Comrade Makarov. Is sulphidine needed?"

"Badly!" exclaimed Makarov. "We can't get it anywhere."

"You'll be issued thirty grams from my special fund. Leave today. And come back when the boy is out of danger."

Turning to Dubenko, the People's Commissar went on:

"And you go straight to a hotel. Take five days' rest, and then we can talk."

A telephone rang. The secretary hurried in, exclaiming:

"Comrade People's Commissar, the Kremlin's on the line."

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

From out the deserted shops it seemed to creep—the dead hush that blanketed the town. The rhythmic breath of the blowers, the pulse of the works, had ceased. The very air had changed. It had lost its faint odour of gas; and even this odour, once detested, was now missed as an indispensable element of life.

The town had come into being together with the works, had grown as the works expanded. New blast furnaces had been built—and new houses had sprung up in the workers' settlement. Recreation rooms and dining rooms had been organized in the shops—and, in the town, there had appeared clubhouses and restaurants. The roads and paths on the works territory had been paved—and asphalt had covered the town's streets